

VZCZCXRO9009  
RR RUEHAP RUEHDT RUEHNZ RUEHPB  
DE RUEHWL #0260/01 2222033  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 102032Z AUG 09  
FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0107  
INFO ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE  
RHMCSUU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHMFISS/CJTTF HOA  
RUEHAP/AMEMBASSY APIA 0013  
RUEHBN/AMCONSUL MELBOURNE 0009  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0009  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0030  
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 0028  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0001  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0001  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0001  
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 0027  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 WELLINGTON 000260

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE  
STATE FOR STATE FOR EAP/ANP  
PACOM FOR J01E/J2/J233/J5/SJFHQ

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [NZ](#) [AF](#) [US](#)  
SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND SAS RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN

¶1. (SBU) Summary. On August 10, New Zealand Prime Minister John Key announced that his country's elite SAS will be re-deployed to Afghanistan. He also stated that the New Zealand-led PRT will, over the next three to five years, draw down its military component and increase its civilian contribution to focus more on reconstruction and capacity building. Key revealed that New Zealand will establish a permanent diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, transferring that responsibility from its mission in Tehran. While he refuted any suggestion of US pressure in arriving at these decisions, many NZ observers will interpret Key's announcement as a dramatic commitment to build a stronger and more positive relationship with the United States. End Summary.

#### Government Announces New Afghanistan Deployments

-----

¶2. (SBU) On August 10, Prime Minister John Key announced that his Government would soon return New Zealand's SAS special forces to Afghanistan and began a three to five year process of shifting its highly regarded Bamyan PRT from a military peace keeping to a civilian reconstruction emphasis. In the traditional post-Cabinet press conference Key stated that New Zealand has a direct and vital interest in supporting international efforts to eradicate terrorism and promote peace and stability. Key then outlined the various ways in which New Zealand will contribute to these efforts.

#### NZ Special Forces to Return to Afghanistan

-----

¶3. (SBU) PM Key announced that up to 70 of New Zealand's elite SAS will return to Afghanistan beginning as soon as possible. He said the troops would be deployed for up to 18 months, in three rotations. Key noted that this new deployment "follows decisions by the previous Labour government to deploy the SAS to Afghanistan on three separate occasions." Asked by a journalist whether the GNZ would consider extending its SAS commitment to Afghanistan beyond 18 months, Key replied that he believes the situation will improve and therefore not warrant an extension. Key emphasized that the SAS will be under NZ command and will reserve the right not to participate in operations.

#### NZ PRT to Drawdown, Civilian Presence to Increase

-----

¶4. (SBU) Key also announced that the NZ Defence Force (NZDF) contingent of the NZ-run provincial reconstruction team (PRT) in

Bamyan province will be drawn down in the medium term, which he defined as three to five years. As NZDF contingent in the PRT draws down, the civilian contribution will increase and focus on rebuilding local capacity in agriculture, education and health. Key noted that he hoped the drawdown period could be shorter, but had been advised by the NZDF that the 3 to 5 year timeline was more realistic.

#### NZ PRT to Align with US Capacity Building Policy -----

15. (SBU) Key promised that NZ's efforts in Bamyan province would "be aligned with the new policy of the Obama Administration, which includes building the capacity of the Afghanistan central government and provincial governments." This re-alignment of the PRT's work, Key added "will include helping build the capacity of the Afghan National Police to facilitate an accelerated transfer of the lead security role in Bamyan to the police and a phased reduction in NZDF personnel over time."

#### Captured Detainees Given to Afghan Authorities -----

16. (SBU) Any detainees captured by NZ armed forces will be handed directly to Afghan authorities, announced Key. Key reminded assembled media that Afghanistan is a signatory to the Geneva Conventions and revealed that its Government had provided the GNZ a formal assurance that detainees would be treated humanely. In the past week, NZ media have reported that some detainees captured during

WELLINGTON 00000260 002 OF 002

previous SAS deployments to Afghanistan had been denied their rights under the Geneva Conventions after they were handed over to U.S. forces.

#### NZ to Establish Diplomatic Presence in Afghanistan -----

17. (SBU) Finally, Key stated that the GNZ will establish a permanent diplomatic presence in Afghanistan. Presently, NZ's Embassy in Tehran covers Afghanistan. Key released no further details on this matter at the press conference.

#### A Welcome Decision, but No Pressure -----

18. (SBU) In response to a question from a journalist, PM Key said that his government had informed the U.S. of its deployment plans, but he strongly refuted any suggestion that New Zealand had received pressure from the USG. Instead, Key painted a stark picture of the risk of international terrorism to all nations including New Zealand. New Zealand had no choice but to join the international effort as terrorist attacks spread from the United States to London to the nearby resort of Bali.

19. (SBU) Comment: Key's announcement will be clearly understood by New Zealand observers as a dramatic demonstration of his commitment to a stronger and more positive relationship with the United States. End Comment.  
KEEGAN